DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 176 318 CS 205 176

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TITLE Preparing to Teach a Technical Writing Course in the Two-Year College.
PUB DATE Apr 79
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (30th, Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 5-7, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Instruction; *Instructional Materials; Junior Colleges; *Technical Education; *Technical Writing

ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to give assistance to a teacher teaching a course in technical writing at a two-year college for the first time. It assumes that the technical writing course is a support or service course rather than a course for technical writing majors and that the English department and the college administration want a technical writing course. It suggests that the teacher write publishers for examination copies of potential textbooks and instructors' manuals and provides a list of names and addresses of publishers as well as information about an annotated bibliography of writing texts available through the National Council of Teachers of English. It then recommends books that should be part of the teacher's professional library, along with brief annotations and publisher information. A list of professional organizations and journals is provided, as are suggestions for additions to the school library. The paper recommends that the teacher communicate with local businesses and industry and with the technical faculty to get specific suggestions for what might be included in the course. A questionnaire for this purpose is included as is a suggested questionnaire for getting student information. (TJ)

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PREPARING TO TEACH A TECHNICAL WRITING COURSE IN THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

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ED176318

No course in the English curriculum of the two-year college has enjoyed more popularity of late than has technical writing. This popularity can be attributed primarily to two factors: a large segment of entering freshmen in the community college is interested in career-oriented education and taxpayers are willing to finance programs in vocational-technical education. Thus, technical writing, as an integral part of the technical curriculum, occupies an enviable position: it attracts both students and funds.

So--how does the teacher educated to handle standard composition courses adapt to the lucrative specialized composition area, Technical Writing? This paper is an attempt to answer some of the questions and frustrations posed by the two-year-college teacher who is preparing to teach, for the first time, a course in Technical Writing. Since many of the questions and frustrations take care of themselves once the prepared instructor gets in the classroom, the paper limits itself to two considerations: (1) Materials and (2) Contacts with local people.

At the outset, however, two assumptions:

-It is assumed that the Technical Writing course (program) is a support or service course; that is, students who are enrolled in Technical Writing are not there because they are majoring in Technical Writing but because they need to develop communication skills that will be demanded of them on the job (as an electronics technician, respiratory therapist, auto mechanic, data programmer, fire fighter, etc.). (Only some half dozen of the total of almost thirteen hundred two-year colleges in the U.S. offer a major in Technical Writing.)

-It is assumed that the English department and the college administration want a Technical Writing course. Certainly, in some institutions problems exist, such as the bogey bear of humanities vs. technology, the passé department chair or dean who sees no relation between classroom instruction and preparing a student to make a living, or the I-don't-know-how-so-I-can't-teach-it syndrome. In the main, however, two-year institutions are well attuned both to the expectations and demands of business and industry and to the subtleties of securing financial support.

MATERIALS

In making arrangements for materials (such as textbooks, professional books and periodicals, and library requests), usually the new instructor must do a number of things simultaneously (ideally months in advance; but in a pinch, PLEASE RUSH requests and telephone calls answer satisfactorily).

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1. Textbooks. For most teachers (and for the bookstore), deciding on a textbook is important. Since searching out specific textbook titles and authors is time-consuming, why not simply write several publishing companies that offer a variety of technical writing texts. Request an examination copy of each of their technical writing textbooks and the accompanying instructor's manual (the instructor's manual can be helpful not only in giving comments about the textbook and student activities but also in suggesting overall plans and procedures for the course and in providing tips for instructor enrichment). You might start with these publishers:

Glencoe Publishing Company
17337 Ventura Boulevard
Encino, CA 91316
Telephone (213) 990-3080

College Division
Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.
10 East 53rd Street
New York, NY 10022
Telephone (212) 592-7000

College Division
Holt, Rinehart, and Winston
CBS Inc., 383 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10017
Telephone (212) 688-9100

College Division
Houghton-Mifflin
1 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02107
Telephone (617) 725-5000

College Division
Prentice-Hall, Inc.
Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632
Telephone (201) 592-2000

The main office of the publishing company will send your request to the appropriate regional office for response. This activity should yield you a dozen or so possible texts.

An alternate suggested approach to the textbook selection problem is to secure the annotated bibliography edited by Robert B. Donovan, Recommended Technical Writing Texts for Secondary Schools, Two-Year College and Four-Year Colleges. Prepared for the NCTE Committee on Technical and Scientific Writing in August 1977, the bibliography is being published by the Society for Technical Communication (address given below).

2. Personal Professional Library. The examination textbook copies will, of course, become a part of your professional library in technical writing. Simply sitting down and reading some of all of them--and all of some of them--will not only enhance your perspective in the teaching of technical writing but also reveal that many of the writing principles you teach in your standard composition course are applicable to technical writing. Textbooks, however, are designed for the student.

You as an instructor need to buy--and devour--certain materials. Three publications designed for the instructor are a must:

· Cunningham, Donald H., and Herman A. Estrin, editors. The Teaching of Technical Writing. Bibliography. 221 p. 1975. No. 51752J, $6.75 ($4.50, member price). National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. Telephone (317) 328-3870. The twenty-four articles are organized around these eight topics: Technical Writing Defined; Teaching Technical Writing; Skills, Needs, and Goals of the Technical Writing Student; Technical Writing Teachers Appraise the Curriculum; Technical Writing in Action; Evaluating Technical Writing; The Nexus: School and Industry; and Technical Writing: The Science and the Art.

· Pearsall, Thomas E. Teaching Technical Writing: Methods for College English Teachers. Bibliography. 23 p. 1975. $5.00 ($2.00 member price). Society for Technical Communication, 1010 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005. Telephone (202) 737-0035. This publication is designed primarily for the new teacher of technical writing. It provides a definition and discussion of technical writing, suggestions for writing assignments, and guides for class activities.

· Sawyer, Thomas M., editor. Technical and Professional Communication: Teaching in the Two-Year College, Four-Year College, Professional School. 204 p. 1977. $4.95 plus 0.40 shipping/handling. Professional Communication Press, 2378 E. Stadium Blvd., Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Telephone (313) 971-1050. The twenty articles give an overview of teaching technical writing at various levels in higher education. Several articles encourage the sharing of knowledge and experience in teaching technical writing; other articles provide basic information and guides for acquiring materials and developing resources for a program in technical writing.

3. Professional Organizations and Journals. If you are not already a member of these organizations, join immediately:

· Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (includes subscription to The Technical Writing Teacher, published three times a year). Dues are still only $3.00 for one year, $6.00 for two years, and $9.00 for three years. Make checks payable to Nell Ann Pickett, ATTW Secretary-Treasurer, Box 408, Hinds Junior College, Raymond, MS 39154. Undoubtedly, for the teacher of technical writing, The Technical Writing Teacher is the single most helpful publication available. It contains down-to-earth articles, reviews of books in the field, and an annual bibliography.

· National Council of Teachers of English (includes subscription to one journal: Language Arts, English Journal or College English; each is published monthly September through April). Individuals, $20.00 per year; institutions, $25.00. The annual convention has sessions on technical writing; in alternate years usually there is a three-day preconvention workshop on technical writing. NCTE publishes several materials on technical writing, and one of the Council's committees is the Committee on Technical and Scientific Writing (Chair: Don Cunningham, UPO 685, Morehead State University, Morehead, KY 40351; Assistant Chair: David Carson, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY 12181). Send dues to NCTE Subscription Service, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.

· Conference on College Composition and Communication (includes subscription to College Composition and Communication). $5.00 per year. The annual convention has a series of sessions on technical writing, and the journal from time to time contains articles on technical writing. Send membership/subscription to NCTE Headquarters, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.

· Regional NCTE conference for teachers in two-year colleges. Each of the six regional conferences has an annual convention and publishes a newsletter. Typically the annual convention has sessions on technical writing. For information concerning your Regional, write NCTE Headquarters (address given above).

In addition, subscribe to:

· Teaching English in the Two-Year College (published three times a year). Individuals, $3.00; libraries and institutions, $5.00. Published under the auspices of the "Program for Two-Year College English Teachers" at East Carolina University, the journal typically has at least one article per issue on technical writing (the entire Fall 1975 issue was devoted to technical writing). Send subscriptions to Teaching English in the Two-Year College, Department of English, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27834.

4. Library Requests. Request that your library acquire all of the books and periodicals mentioned in numbers 2 and 3 above. In addition, request that your library add to its holdings the following:

· The textbook (two copies minimum) that you adopt. Have the books put on reserve (for use in the library only). Thus, students who need a textbook but who may not have temporary access to a personal copy can always go to the library. (Each student, of course, should have a personal copy of the textbook. The library holding is to serve in an emergency.)

· Journal of Technical Writing and Communication. Subscription is by annual volume (four issues) only, $40.00 prepaid. The journal is published by Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 120 Marine St., Farmingdale, NY 11735.

· Technical Communication. Published quarterly by the Society for Technical Communication, the journal is included in the annual membership dues of $20.00 (also included is the bi-monthly newsletter Intercom). There is an enrollment fee of $5.00. Subscription to the journal alone is $4.00 per issue, $17.00 for one year, $30.00 for two years, and $40.00 for three years. Send order to Executive Director, Society for Technical Communication, 815 Fifteenth St. NW, Washington, DC 20005.

· Journal of Business Communication. This is published quarterly by the American Business Communication Association; membership in ABCA includes a subscription to the journal and to the monthly ABCA Bulletin. Membership is $20.00 per year (non-members, $5.00 per issue for the journal). Send membership/subscription to Francis W. Weeks, 911 S. Sixth St., Champaign, IL 61820.

CONTACTS WITH LOCAL PEOPLE

Once you have materials on the way to you and to the library, concentrate on making contacts with key local people.

· Visit businesses and industries that hire graduates of your college. Even just two or three interviews with business people and industrial personnel will broaden your perspective immeasureably. Either on your own or through the director of technical education at your college,, set up each interview with an appropriate official at the plant to be visited. At the interview, ask for guidance in planning an English course that will really help students once they are on the job. Ask what kind of speaking and writing skills employees at the technician level need. Keep a record of each interview, including a summary of the points that were discussed.

· Solicit help from the technical faculty. An incomparable ally in the teaching of technical writing is the technical faculty in your institution. Cultivate them. Let them know that you need their help, that you are interested in their majors, that you want to make Technical Writing a truly supportive course. One way to solidify this call for help is to send a questionnaire to the chair of each department whose majors you teach. With the questionnaire send a brief outline of the units to be covered in the technical writing course. Ask each department to supply topics for each unit (or kind of assignment). Attachment 1 gives a suggested questionnaire.

· Get to know your students. At the first class meeting, begin to put names with faces and personalities and major fields of study. Ask students to fill in a student information form. Attachment 2 is an example of the Student Information Form that Colleague Ann Laster and I have devised. We remind students of several things: (1) This Student Information Form is designed to give your Technical Writing instructor a profile of you as a student, (2) Most of the requested information, you have already given in admission and registration forms. By repeating this information, however, you are making it readily accessible to your Technical Writing teacher who is keenly interested in you, and (3) You may omit answering any of the items.

CLOSING COMMENT

As with preparing to teach any other course, preparing to teach Technical Writing involves more than compiling useful materials and establishing contact with pertinent people. Certainly, the instructor should plan a syllabus, course and unit objectives, and student learning activities. Certainly, too, the instructor should attend professional meetings and workshops and should take formal courses in Technical Writing and in the Teaching of Technical Writing.

These actions for the instructor new to the teaching of Technical Writing will come in time.

Basic, however, to the instructor's initial effectiveness in the classroom, are two actions: (1) the acquiring and subsequent assimilation of helpful materials and (2) the contacting of business and industrial personnel, technical faculty, and students. When the Technical Writing instructor becomes thus involved, rewarding results occur: frustrations about teaching a new course dissipate; the nstructor realizes that many techniques, methods and principles of the standard composition course can be easily adapted to Technical Writing; students in occupationally-oriented programs request--and often demand--an English course geared to their needs; and problems with accountability (often intertwined with funding) fade because Technical Writing is concerned with visible skills essential in the workaday world.

TO: Technical Department Chairmen and Technical Faculty

FROM: Technical Writing Instructors [give name of each instructor]

SUBJECT: Ideas, suggestions, topics for writing

DATE:

Technical Writing should be as responsive as possible to the needs of students. To do so, we need you to help us.

Would you as a department confer (perhaps at your first departmental meeting) in responding to the questions below. This information is needed immediately so that it can be incorporated into plans for the Technical Writing course. Your responses not only will help us do a better job in teaching practical communication skills but also will help us reinforce what you are doing in the classroom.

Given below is the table of contents from the text that we use for our two-semester technical writing course. Please answer the questions that we have added and PLEASE make comments. We in the English classroom want to make our work directly supportive of the courses that you teach. Attach additional pages as needed.

Part I: Forms of Communication

Ch. 1 Instructions and Process: Explaining a Procedure
[What procedures should students be able to explain?]

Ch. 2 Description of a Mechanism: Explaining How Something Works
[What mechanisms should students be able to describe?]

Ch. 3 Definition: Explaining What Something Is
[What terms should students be able to define?]

Ch. 4 Analysis Through Classification and Partition: Putting Things in Order
[What groups of items should students be able to classify? What singular items should they be able to partition, or divide?]

Ch. 5 Analysis Through Effect-Cause and Comparison-Contrast: Looking at Details [What effect-cause relationships should students be able to explain? What comparisons-contrasts should they be able to make?]

Ch. 6 The Summary: Getting to the Heart of the Matter
[What kinds of summaries (annotations, abstracts, reviews) should students be able to write?]

Ch. 7 Business Letters: Sending a Message Through the Mail
[What kinds of business letters should students be able to write?]

Ch. 8 Report Writing: Telling It Like It is
[What kinds of reports should students be able to write?]

Ch. 9 The Research Report: Becoming Acquainted with Resource Materials
[What are suggested topics for research reports?]

Ch. 10 Oral Communication: Saying It Clearly
[What are situations in which oral presentations are necessary?]

Ch. 11 Visuals: Seeing Is Convincing
[What kinds of graphics and other visual aids should students be familiar with?]

Part II: Selected Readings

Cartoon from School Shop
"Clear Only If Known," by Edgar Dale
"The Unknown Citizen," by W. H. Auden
"The Computer Society: Business," from Time
"The Laser: Humanitarian Hope or Doomsday Device?" by Harry J. Partin
"Is Everybody Happy?" by James V. Smith
"Quality," by John Galsworthy
Excerpt from "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance," by Robert M. Pirsig
"The Science of Deduction," by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
"Are You Alive?" by Stuart Chase
"Clear Writing Means Clear Thinking Means. . .," by Marvin H. Swift
"To Serve the Nation: Life Is More than a Career," by Jeffrey R. Holland

[What periodicals and reference works should students be familiar with? What reading other than professional materials do you suggest?]

Part III: Handbook

Ch. 1 The Sentence
Ch. 2 The Paragraph
Ch. 3 Grammatical Usage and Word Choice
Ch. 4 Mechanics

[What other writing skills should be emphasized?]

STUDENT INFORMATION FORM
(Pickett/Laster)

Course and section _____

Date _____

Major _____

Social Security No. _____

Full name _____
(Last) (First) (Middle)

Mailing address _____
(Street, Box, or Route Number)

_____
(City) (State) (Zip)

Phone number: School _____ Home _____

Name and address of parents (or other close relative) _____

_____

Marital status _____ Age _____ Sex _____ Race _____

Do you work while attending school? _____ Yes _____ No If yes, how many hours per week? ___ Where? _____

Do you live on campus? _____ Yes _____ No If yes, which dorm? _____

Do you receive financial aid? _____ Yes _____ No If yes, which kind? _____

_____

Name and address of high school attended _____
(Name)

_____
(City) (State)

Have you attended another college? _____ Yes _____ No If yes, where and when?

_____

What are your family responsibilities? _____

_____

_____

List the college English courses in which you have credit and the college giving the credit.

List below your class schedule for this semester.

COURSE & SECTION	HOUR/DAY	BUILDING/ROOM NO.	INSTRUCTOR

If right now you could be wherever you wanted to be, doing whatever you wanted to, where would you be and what would you be doing?

Give three interesting facts about yourself.

Comments: